

Revitalization of Queen's Park North

Focus Group with Heritage Groups

Summary of Discussion

Online via Zoom

Thursday, August 7 2025; 7:00 – 8:30pm

Participants: Annex Residents' Association – Heritage Team, City of Toronto Heritage Planning; St. Lawrence Neighbourhood Association – Heritage Committee, Victoria College – University of Toronto

This summary was written by Third Party Public and was shared with participants in draft before being finalized.

Feedback on recognizing the history and heritage of Queen's Park North

1. **Given the importance of this park in Toronto, any changes to this park will be considered a dramatic move.** To provide feedback on any proposed changes, first we need to understand how the park has been planned in the past and how it has changed over time and why. It is important to tell this story. It is Canada's oldest public park and Torontonians have used the space for 160 years. That's the only park like this in the city.
2. **Examining and recognizing the cultural heritage of the landscape in which the park sits, including Queen's Park North itself, needs to be foundational to the process of planning its revitalization,** not an afterthought. There are two foundational documents to draw on for this, one written by ERA Architects and the other by Lynne DiStefano (a well-known heritage consultant and urbanist), including a cultural heritage landscape plan, documenting the cultural heritage of the park and surrounding area. This work should be closely examined and play a key role in helping to define any park changes.
3. **Cultural heritage is not static – it is active and ongoing.** Heritage is living and needs ongoing stewardship. Think about it as a living thing. Just like Indigenous heritage is not something that happened only in the past – it continues to today. The trees are also part of the cultural heritage. A cultural heritage landscape plan for Queen's Park North would be helpful. The work of ERA and Lynne DiStefano can help establish a cultural heritage framework for the park.
4. **Cultural heritage can be used to support the Weston legacy with this park.** Any changes considered as part of the revitalization process could be reviewed to see how they align with the cultural heritage landscape. Then we can identify where we see "red" lights (areas raising big concern and a move could destroy something we agree is critical to the park) versus "amber" lights where changes may be more acceptable. This
5. **All histories, both Indigenous and colonial, are important to understand and recognize in any changes proposed to the park.** Any change proposed will be dramatic so it is important changes are routed in recognizing the heritage of the park and surrounding area.
6. **Examine connections to heritage in the surrounding area.** Queen's Park North has significant historical connections to the surrounding area (e.g., the University of Toronto's colleges that surround the park). Examining these connections will be important to understand and recognize the heritage of the park.

Feedback on the Draft Vision:

“Queen’s Park North is an extraordinary place for people and nature throughout the seasons, that respects the existing beauty of Queen’s Park and showcases excellence in design, ecological stewardship, programming and partnerships.”

1. Add a more **explicit reference to recognizing the history and heritage of the park**. There appears to be an implicit reference through the language of “existing beauty” but a more explicit reference would be helpful to show heritage will be a foundational part of the process / plan.
2. **Connect “stewardship” to heritage in the vision**. Heritage should not be tied to a single point in the past but should represent the evolution of the place.
3. **Make the language more accessible and less corporate**. Use more plain language in the vision to help motivate members of the public to get behind it and support it.
4. **Explain what is meant by “people and nature”**. Consider expanding on these terms to ensure they are clearly defined and well understood.

Feedback on the Draft Guiding Principles

1. Find ways to weave heritage throughout all of the Guiding Principles to show its importance in the process.
2. Remember that cultural heritage is not something to “check off the list” – it is living and breathing. It can help respond to the feedback in the previous project that said Queen’s Park North lacks an identity. In the absence of this deeper cultural heritage identity, the default identity becomes the horse.

Next Steps

Participants and project team agreed it would make sense to reconnect again in approximately 3 weeks for a follow-up meeting. At this meeting ERA Architects and Trophic Design said that they will:

- prepare and share a heritage overview of Queen’s Park North that focuses on the whole cultural heritage landscape of the park and the surrounding area and context in which it sits;
- start to identify what it is about this space that has value through a cultural heritage lens; and
- consider the extraordinary opportunity to identify threads that run across Indigenous and settler history potentially using the two-eyed seeing approach*.

Indigenous history encircles colonial history; it doesn’t supersede it. We are in the time of the seventh fire prophecy which holds the promise of reconciliation, and we can think about how the revitalization planning can embody the notion of the 7th fire in the park.

Everyone invited to the first meeting will also be invited to this next meeting, including Lynne DiStefano.

**Two-eyed seeing is a concept developed by Mi’kmaw Elder Albert Marshall that encourages integrating Indigenous and Western ways of knowing to find common ground and create a more holistic understanding. It emphasizes learning from both Indigenous and Western perspectives, recognizing their unique strengths and using them together for the benefit of all, particularly in areas like research, healthcare, and education.*